




State of Wisconsin
Department of Health and Family Services

Jim Doyle, Governor
Helene Nelson, Secretary

DATE: November 15, 2004

TO: Public Health Institute Committee

FROM: Helene Nelson


SUBJECT: Response to Your Report

I want to thank all of you for your thoughtful and diligent work on reviewing options for a Public Health Institute in Wisconsin, producing the report transmitted to me on November 8th by Susan Wood. Also, I appreciate the time that you took to receive comments, questions and advice from interested parties as part of the process.

Because of the strong interest in this topic, I would like to share my initial response to your report promptly. As the steward of state government's Public Health Division, I am very interested in how an institute can "add value" to our current public health system, complementing the appropriate strong roles of state and local government, our fine academic institutions, and other public health system partners. Of course, I recognize that there are many key players in the public health partnership, who will continue to express their views and influence the outcome of this dialogue. Also, the Governor and Legislature will provide the policy and fiscal direction for state government's role. In that context, I offer these comments.

First, the Committee supports the idea of a Public Health Incubator, a proposal submitted by the Wisconsin Public Health Association (WPHA) to create a lean, independent not-for-profit organization that would "grow" new ideas and link existing public health partners in pursuing those opportunities. I am happy to work with WPHA to develop this idea further. I would also like to explore the extent to which the Incubator could also be a vehicle to attract non-state funds including federal funds, foundation funds and other outside resources to help create a stronger public health system in our state. Members of the Assembly Public Health Committee have also expressed an interest in advancing this latter mission for an institute.

Second, I was impressed by the long list of "pros" and the short list of "cons" to additionally create a new public-private health information network or partnership. I am conferring actively with many interested parties about this idea now.

Finally, I am very eager to see our Department and other partners find a way to shift more resources and attention to "prevention" as a highly beneficial and cost-justified health investment. I do not anticipate that this requires any separate structure, but diligent work by many of us to advance this priority in times when governmental resources are particularly strapped.

Thank you again for your good work and sincere interest in public health.